

[By Dan McLean, Burlington Free Press](#)

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., is trying to move the debate on climate change from arguments over global warming to the practical concept that using less fuel, while benefiting the environment, will save money.

"Whatever your opinion on global warming, it really doesn't matter," Welch said, while describing how his Home Star legislation would help Americans lower heating costs.

The measure — which encourages energy efficiency retrofits — provides homeowners savings of about 30 percent on home heating bills, "big time savings," Welch said. The legislation is also designed to create jobs. The \$6 billion proposal allows consumers to obtain rebates at the cash register, unlike some other federal credits, which don't offer the incentive until tax returns are filed. Welch said he prefers to fund the legislation through the \$787 billion federal measure passed last year, but the funding source has yet to be determined.

As written, the legislation would provide homeowners with up to \$3,000 in instant rebates, depending on the purchases, Welch said. Eligible items include "a menu of practical options," including insulation, duct sealing and water heaters.

"They don't have to hassle with it at all," Welch said, of the mechanics of how the rebates are applied. "It's very simple for the consumer. They can make the purchase without having to front the money," he said.

Lynn Goyette and Eileen Blackwood are amid the process of equipping their 1840 Williston home with 21st century insulation technology. The job will cost them about \$6,500, not including incentives they are receiving from Efficiency Vermont to help cover nearly one-third of the cost. Most states, however, don't have a program such as Efficiency Vermont. Home Star, which is sometimes called "cash for caulkers," would provide all Americans with an incentive.

A whopping December and January home heating bill compelled Goyette, 68, to explore more efficient ways to heat her home. December's bill was more than \$700 and January tallied more than \$600. "And it's not even a cold winter," she said. "So we thought we had to do something

about it."

After obtaining an energy audit, which cost about \$375, showing where the cold air was come from, the decision was simple.

"We saw the pictures. And we said, we can't not do this," Goyette said.

The couple, who hosted Welch's news conference Monday morning, won't be eligible for a credit because it will not cover improvements retroactively. Goyette said she is "pretty environmentally focused," but it was the financial savings that gave her "the kick in the butt" to become more efficient — not the reduction in carbon emissions.

Welch is hoping the Home Star legislation will persuade more to make the switch.

Welch introduced the measure in March 2009. It has 79 co-sponsors in the U.S. House. The measure, which costs twice as much as the popular cash-for-clunker law that granted a rebate to people trading aging autos for new, more fuel-efficient versions, is slated to face a hearing Thursday before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Welch said the hearing is a "a major step" in the bills progress.

Aside from helping Americans winterize their homes, reducing emissions and saving households money, the measure would create thousands of jobs, Welch said.

In addition to providing a boost to the local market and retail sector, manufacturing would receive a lift because more than 90 percent of the material used to retrofit a home is made in the United States, he said.

"It's what we have to do to get the economy going," Welch said, estimating 168,000 jobs would be created throughout the U.S. in retail, manufacturing and installation.